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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

MONDAY, MARCH 10, 2008

In Today's Papers

President Talabani Visits Turkey

All papers report Iraqi President Jalal Talabani visited Ankara on Friday. Turkish President Abdullah Gul and President Talabani held a joint press conference after their discussions. During the press conference, Gul said, "Turkey has a vision of an Iraq which has completed its national reconciliation and maintains good relations with its neighbors."

"When the great potential between our two countries is materialized, an exemplary relationship will emerge for the region," Gul said. Gul called on the PKK to lay down their arms. Talabani said, "The Kurdish Regional Administration (KRA) is pressuring the PKK in northern Iraq to either lay down their arms or leave Iraq." Talabani emphasized that "Iraq's constitution does not allow for armed groups' presence on Iraqi soil." Talabani said a political solution to the problem is an issue that concerns Turkey, adding that Iraq would not interfere in this matter, "We want to establish strong relations in all areas, including political, commercial, economic, oil, security, and cultural relations." The Iraqi President also noted President Gul accepted an invitation to visit Iraq.

Islamist-oriented Zaman writes Ankara was pleased with Talabani's promises, but noted reservations regarding the implementation of his pledges. Talabani urged Turkish businessmen to make investments in 'Kurdistan,' weekend papers report. Papers stressed this was the first time a guest of the presidential palace used the word 'Kurdistan.' However, Zaman calls the visit "a new page in Turkish-Iraqi ties." Mainstream Sabah says Gul delivered three main messages to Talabani, "PKK terror must end, compromise on Kirkuk is critical, and Turkey is ready to be Iraq's gate to Europe once the PKK is eliminated." Mainstream Hurriyet reports over the weekend that Talabani recommended to Gul and the AKP government that the Turkish public prepare itself for the recognition of the Kurdish reality. "The Kirkuk issue needs to be resolved among the Turkmen,

the Kurds, and the Arabs. The Americans have not been able to finish off the Taliban or al-Qaeda. Along those same lines, Turkey needs new approaches in order to finish off the PKK," Talabani said according to Hurriyet. Leftist nationalist Cumhuriyet expects a "four-sided mechanism" to be set up among Ankara, Washington, Baghdad, and Erbil to counter terrorism. KRA Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani is expected to be invited to Turkey after Talabani's visit. Talabani's advisor Azad Cundiyan is quoted by papers as saying "the Turkish delegation to Iraq will meet Nechirvan Barzani in Baghdad after the Arab Parliamentarians' Summit talks in Erbil from March 11-13."

Editorial Commentary on the Talabani Visit to Ankara

"A New Wheel Turns Toward a Comprehensive Plan"

Hasan Cemal wrote in mainstream Milliyet (3/9): "While my colleagues and I were talking to President Talabani during his visit to Ankara, one issue was disclosed openly: Following Turkey's land operation, a new wheel is starting to turn. It is my understanding that the wheel will start to turn between Ankara, Baghdad, and Washington. Then, Erbil, meaning the Iraqi Regional Kurdistan Administration, will join. Talabani told Ankara that in order to improve relations with the Regional Kurdish Administration's leader Massoud Barzani, the Kurdish Administration's Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani should be invited to Ankara. Talabani promised a healthy foundation for such a visit and the Turkish side did not reject this offer. When asked whether the PKK could declare a cease-fire, Talabani said "there are signals that there is major pressure from Baghdad, Washington and Erbil on the PKK for a cease-fire." Talabani added that "Barzani keeps saying the PKK will either lay down its arms or leave Iraqi territory for good." However, Talabani said it is not possible for them or the Americans to eradicate the PKK in northern Iraq through military means. One

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other impression I got from the meeting with Talabani and his delegation is that Prime Minister Erdogan is planning a visit to the Southeast with some new messages. In other words, following the military operation, the AKP government is starting a new civil operation regarding the PKK and Kurdish issues. In short, this new wheel could open positive gates regarding the PKK and Kurdish issues."

A Surprise Visit

Yilmaz Oztuna commented in conservative-nationalist Turkiye (3/10): "Iraqi President Jalal Talabani's short visit to Ankara attracted attention. Turkey and Iraq agreed on bilateral friendship and Iraqi territorial integrity. Discussions also included increasing annual bilateral trade from \$4 billion to \$20 billion. Talabani, together with Barzani, established the autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq. Talabani was picked by the US to replace Saddam Hussein as the Iraqi President. Prior to this, Iraqis could not even imagine a Kurd would ever be president of Iraq. However, US failures in Iraq now make many Iraqis long for the old days of Saddam. Talabani spoke just like the Americans in Turkey and urged Turkey to meet with Barzani in order to eradicate the PKK. Turkey definitely wants Iraq to maintain its integrity, and this is the correct policy. Unfortunately, our good wishes are not enough. Iraqi integrity remains in suspense as Iraq struggles to remain stable."

Erdogan Will Present a New Kurdish Package in Diyarbakir April 6
Mainstream Sabah reports Mehmet Metiner, a former advisor to the prime minister on Kurdish issues, says Erdogan is expected to announce measures that will make the PKK militants in the mountains return home. The announcement is expected during the prime minister's trip to Diyarbakir on April 6th. Metiner adds these development measures will deal a heavy blow to the DTP in the upcoming municipality elections. He noted it was essential that the government resolves the employment problems in the region as well. Metiner said Erdogan will tell the people in the region that Turkey has entered into the process of seeking a solution.

Assassination Plot Foiled

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Taraf, Zaman and others report police have captured three suspects from the extreme leftist DHKP-C group (Dev-Yol) who were plotting to assassinate Prime Minister

Erdogan and carry out attacks on American economic interests in Turkey. The suspects were planning to use remote-controlled toy cars to attack the prime minister's convoy. Police seized 35 kg of ammonium nitrate, a Kalashnikov rifle, and remote-controlled toys that had been transformed into bombs.

Controversy Continues over Compulsory Religious Classes in Turkey
Mainstream Milliyet and Sabah report Alevi organizations in Turkey called for an investigation against Education Minister Huseyin Celik. Celik rejected the Council of State (Danistay) decision which deemed compulsory religious education a violation of the Constitution. Celik is refusing to implement the decision. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled in October 2007 that compulsory religious education in Turkey was a violation of freedom of education.

Turkey Lobbies for Recognition of Kosovo
Islamist-oriented Zaman reports Turkey will put pressure on the members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to recognize Kosovo. Foreign Minister Babacan is attending the OIC summit in Dakar, Senegal, which begins today. Egypt, Indonesia, Azerbaijan, and Sudan are working against the recognition of Kosovo, reports Zaman.

Sweden Will Send Iraqi Refugees Back Home
Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports Tobias Billstrom, Sweden's migration minister, said about 1,700 Iraqi refugees will be returned to Iraq. Yusuf Aziz, the Kurdish Regional Administration (KRA) minister for human rights, said the refugees would not be allowed

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into the Kurdish region. Billstrom said the refugees would be deported from Sweden, even if the KRA doesn't accept them.

TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- Today, the second annual "Global Terrorism and International Cooperation" conference will be held in Ankara. NATO general staff chiefs, high-level US military officials, academics, statesmen, and experts from various countries will participate in the meetings. General Yasar Buyukanit, the Chief of the military General Staff, will deliver the opening speech.

- Turkish Parliament Speaker Koksal Toptan will meet with pro-Kurdish DTP MPs today to discuss a democratic solution to the Kurdish question. The DTP also wants meetings with the prime minister and the president, but Gul and Erdogan have not responded to their request.

- Murat Ozcelik has been officially appointed as the Turkish special envoy to Iraq. Ozcelik's predecessor, Oguz Celikkol, was appointed Turkey's Ambassador to Greece.

- The southeastern city of Gaziantep will host the 3rd Iraq International Fair from May 22-25.

International News

- Prime Minister Ehud Olmert approved plans to build hundreds of new Israeli homes near Jerusalem in the occupied West Bank.

- Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Saeid Jalili says his country is ready to negotiate with Europe over its nuclear program if there are practical results.

- Former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif agrees to join the late Benazir Bhutto's party in a coalition government.

WILSON